

ABSTRACT

A method of tracking and dispensing the dispense of medical items for use by patients associated with a health care institution includes storing in a data store in connection with a computer data representative of patients and medical items prescribed for the patients.

5 Authorized users such as a nurse, are enabled to dispense prescribed items for patients through medical item dispensers. A record is included in the data store that the medical items have been dispensed. In an exemplary system (650) medical items that have been dispensed are tracked to the point of giving the item to the patients using portable terminals (662) that are carried to the bedside of the patients. The activity of giving the appropriate medical item to each respective  
10 patient is recorded in the portable terminal as medical items are given to a plurality of patients. The data stored in the portable terminal concerning the giving of medical items to patients is communicated through the system and stored in the data store to provide a record that the medical items which were dispensed for a patient were actually administered. In an alternative form of the system (700) patients are enabled to dispense medications on an outpatient basis  
15 through a self service medical item dispenser (718). In a method of operating such a system a benefit plan associated with the patient is determined from rules stored in connection with data representative of the benefit plan. Payment for dispensed medications is provided by the benefits provider associated with the patient's benefits plan and a co-payment is made by the patient from a credit or debit card account.